

## **WAGERS ON NEVADA BANNED IN 1960: State of betting has changed**

**Between 1960 and 2001, action wasn't allowed on UNR, UNLV**

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Monday, September 30, 2002

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Although you must go back a long way, bettors could wager on games involving Nevada college teams before last year, when a ban was lifted by the Nevada Gaming Commission.

A betting ban on Nevada teams was adopted by gaming regulators in early 1960 as part of new rules and regulations in the 1959 Gaming Control Act. The prohibition was one of few changes in the gaming code previously regulated by the Nevada Tax Commission.

It is generally believed that the first time the public could bet on Nevada teams was in 2001 after the gaming commission eliminated the ban, but that is not true.

The change came about in reaction to federal legislation sponsored by Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., to end betting on college games in Nevada. Nevada regulators said that by allowing betting on Nevada teams, it would allow them to follow the betting line and investigate possible irregularities.

The changes in the Nevada gaming law in 1959-60 were historic because they marked the movement of gaming regulation from the Nevada Tax Commission to the Gaming Control Board and Nevada Gaming Commission.

Sports and race betting was legalized in Nevada in 1941.

The only university playing football in the state at the time was the University of Nevada. UNLV did not start football until 1968. The first Rebels basketball team in 1958-59 played a mix of junior colleges, service teams, small colleges and the UNR freshmen. The 1959-60 change attracted little attention.

"We can't find any comment on it," Jeff Kintop, state archives manager, said. "It was one of the new rules promulgated by the Nevada Gaming Control Board. There was no comment in the newspaper other than it was a new rule. There was no real discussion of it in the minutes. I can't give you any background on it."

A public hearing on the state's proposed changes took place on Dec. 14, 1959. A story in the Nevada State Journal of Reno the following day read, "Hardly anyone came. And those who did had nothing to say."

Wayne Pearson, former member of the Gaming Control Board, said Nevada gaming regulators shouldn't have eliminated the ban. He said allowing betting on games involving Nevada teams invites trouble and creates the wrong perception.

Pearson, who was a member of the control board from 1967-69, said an example of the dangers was an incident that occurred after a Nevada football game in 1948, when the Wolf Pack was rated in the top 10.

Previously undefeated Nevada was upset by Santa Clara 14-0 on Nov. 7, 1948, in Sacramento. The Wolf Pack was favored by 21 points.

A New York tabloid, Sports Week, headlined a story "Books Make Killing in Nevada Grid Coup." The story said Santa Clara's victory over Nevada was "one of the most sensational gambling coups ever to blight collegiate football. ... a 'sure thing' for an exclusive group of Reno's legalized bookmaking fraternity. ... a well-laid plot."

Nevada State Journal sports editor Ty Cobb wrote that the New York tabloid's charges were a "New high in low ... No proof. Plenty of rotten insinuations ... to blacken the names of Nevada football and the individual players beyond repair."

A formal letter denying the allegations was sent to Sports Week by attorneys for Nevada athletic director and football coach Joe Sheeketski and the University of Nevada Board of Athletic Control.

The letter read, "The charges in your article are infamous, untrue and damaging to Nevada athletics ... your unwarranted charges. We regard the charges in your article as deliberately malicious, carelessly published and made without adequate investigation and with no proof to sustain them."

Cobb wrote that he surveyed Reno sports books and found that only \$218 was bet on the game, which he said would hardly make it a "gambling coup." A spokesman for one Reno sports book said less than \$500 was bet at Reno sports books on the game.

Pearson said the downturn of big-time football at Nevada started with that controversial loss.

"It took so much out of the community emotionally," he said. "The loss to start with, and then the reaction afterward, particularly the reaction after, it was just like the whole community -- the university and the Western Nevada community -- had just been hit in the stomach."

"The program just went downhill after that and was dropped entirely for one year following the 1950 season during which they won only one game. It has never, ever come back to this day to the level it was in the 1940s."

Pearson said he is afraid allegations of that nature could occur again now that betting on Nevada colleges is legal.

"It only takes one incident to make a scandal," he said. "Human nature being what it is, there will be a scandal one day."

Pearson said the 1960 ban probably would have come much earlier, but when the Wolf Pack resumed football in 1952 after a one-year absence, it played such a low-key, small-time schedule, the games would not have attracted betting.

"There's the probability that the books voluntarily decided not to accept wagers on Nevada schools," he said. "It is easy to decide you are not going to accept the wagers when there is no action anyway."

Dick Trachok, who was a halfback on the team and later football coach and athletic director at Nevada, noted that Nevada played teams such as Chico State, the Cal Aggies, San Francisco State and Humboldt State when it began playing again in 1952.

"There's no way that schedule could get on the books," he said. "You don't see Division II schools on the line now. It was just too small-time."

Several players vigorously denied any wrongdoing in the Santa Clara game. Nevada finished the season 9-2, including a loss to Villanova in the Harbor Bowl in San Diego. But the loss was costly because Nevada was expected to go to the Sugar Bowl.

The Wolf Pack was led by All-America quarterback Stan Heath and several other players who moved on to the NFL, including Sherman Howard with Cleveland, Dan Orlich with Green Bay and Tommy Kalmanir with Los Angeles and Baltimore.

Tight end and team captain Scott Beasley, who went on to play in the Canadian Football League, reacted with sarcasm to the charges of any wrong-doing.

"You can see us throwing the game on purpose so we wouldn't have to go to the Sugar Bowl," said Beasley, a retired Reno elementary principal. "It was the farthest thing from our minds. The fact is, I took a couple of shots of Novocain to even play, I wanted to play so badly. I would never do it again. I would never recommend it. But I was young then and wanted to play."

Orlich, a tight end who later played for the Green Bay Packers, said the allegations of a fix were "a bunch of baloney. Fifty years later it is real easy to say bad things about the game. There was nothing amiss. We ran into a windstorm. It blew Stan Heath's passing right out of the window."

Defensive end Tom Bell, who later became a university regent and a prominent Las Vegas attorney who represented Howard Hughes, said he remembers the charges, but said they had no foundation.

"I was not aware of any corruption or buying off the team or anything of that nature," he said. "I had no knowledge there was any betting or corruption on the Nevada team to blow the game."